

*L. Waters of Hand & Thos.*

# REMARKS

ON A

## LETTER

FROM SOME

**Dissenting Ministers**

Assembled at

**COLNBROOK,**

To their Brethren in

**LONDON.**

WRITTEN

For the **ADVANCEMENT** of the **NON-CONFORMING INTEREST** throughout the Nation.

Printed for J. Nutt, near Stationers' Hall, 1796.

# REMARKS

ON A

## LETTER

THE Reader, perhaps may be curious to know the Reason of the great Distance between the Dates of the Letter and the Remarks. It will be proper therefore to tell him that the Letter not coming to the Remarker's Hand till after the middle of January last: the Remarks could not well be expected sooner.

The Letter is printed exactly from the Copy, and to satisfy the World that it is Genuine, I have here subscrib'd the Persons Names to whom it was sent. Mr. How, Mr. Hammond, Mr. Allon, Mr. Stretton, Mr. Williams, Mr. Sylvester, Mr. Sheffield, Mr. Spademan, Mr. Shower, Mr. N. Taylor, Mr. Flemming, Mr. Oldfield, Mr. Reynolds, Mr. Stretton junior, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Cotton, Mr. Calamy, Mr. Harris, Mr. Ch. Taylor.

L O N D O N

WRITTEN

For the ADVANCEMENT of the NON-CONFORMING INTEREST through-



### ERRATA:

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46. 11. 3. 702



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**A**

**LETTER**

**FROM THE**

**Dissenting Ministers**

Assembled at

**COLNBROOK**

*March the 4th 170<sup>1</sup>,*

To their Brethren in

**LONDON.**

*Reverend Brethren,*

**I**T is now about Four Years, since some of You professed to be sensible of the broken State of the Non-conformists Churches, and of the Scandalous Divisions, and Disorders, that had broken in upon us for want of our being duly Compacted together as one Body. These and other Considerations gave Occasion to a most

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Noble and Excellent project you then formed, of a General Correspondence.

When you Communicated this matter to us, and other Ministers throughout the Nation, it generally met with a Cheerful and ready Concurrence of the Brethren in the Country; who greatly Rejoyced, that God had put it into your Hearts to engage in such a Work, as was likely to produce more than Ordinary Blessings amongst us. Had you still pursued this useful Design with the same Diligence, and Zeal, as you had begun, it would probably not only by this time have exceedingly advanced our Common Interest, (which ought to be dear to all faithful Ministers of Christ) but would have secured to your selves, that Respect, and Deference, which your Brethren in the Country had always deservedly paid to the Ministers in the City.

But, alas! how soon did you give just grounds of Complaint to us and others, that this Excellent project of a general Correspondence was stifled in its very Birth, and your weekly Meetings too almost grown out of use? Could we then foresee the Evil Consequences of this Negligence, and not be concerned? Could we behold the Nonconforming Interest sensibly Declining, and Disorders and Confusions abounding in many parts, and yet do nothing in order to revive the one, or redress the other? Could we look back on former times, wherein, under the most Disadvantageous Circumstances, we were still gaining ground, and not behold with shame how Contemptible we were become in the Eyes of our insulting Adversaries, even then, when we were by Divine Mercy blest with Liberty and Peace for many Years? Could we be so Blind, as not to see to what Causes these Evils were principally to be imputed? Or to whom (next to God himself) we should apply our selves for a Remedy?

Being moved therefore, Reverend Brethren, by these Considerations, we thought Our selves obliged humbly to expostulate with you about these things; and to press you, with all the earnestness, both to Revive the general Correspondence,



Correspondence, and your Weekly Meetings in London. This we did in a Letter Dated from *Chersey*, Octob. 5th, 1699, wherein we express our Thought and Desires with that Modesty, which became Us towards our worthy Brethren, and yet with that freedom and plainness, which our Relation to *Christ Jesus*, Our concern for his Church, and Our Ordination Vow, did both warrant and engage us to do. This Our faithful Admonition was by God's Blessing so Effectual, that it speedily awaken'd a great number of you to consult together about the Subject Matter of our Address. Then you agreed to revive your Weekly Meetings, and to consider what was further Expedient to be done for our Common Welfare. Of which we receiv'd an Account (as well as of the kind acceptance of our Proposals) by a Letter from the worthy Mr. *Alsop*, written Octob. 26th following, at your Request. This produc'd in us a grateful sense of your Respects to us therein expressed, and Thankfulness to God, who had vouchsafed to Bless our poor, but sincere Endeavours, with so great success.

Not long after this (*viz.* April 10th. 1700) our Brethren, who met at *Newberry*, found it requisite to put you in Mind again, by another Letter, of the general Correspondence, and with many cogent Reasons to quicken you to a Revival of it. No Answer being return'd hereunto, (which seem'd Strange and Unaccountable) those Brethren however were not so much discouraged, but that they made another Attempt to awaken you in a Letter Dated from *Newberry* Octob. 9th following, to which we also subscribed our concurrence Novemb. 12th. and sent it up to you. But your selves best know what is the Reason, that this Letter too remains unanswered to this Day.

We cannot, Dear Brethren, Reflect on these things without many sad Thoughts of heart, and fear least this insensibility forebode some impending Judgments upon us, however, though we be cast down, yet we are not in Despair, for we have yet some hopes that God will at length hear our Prayers, and Bless our Endeavours for his Church, and

Interest amongst us; and that he will revive in you an hearty Zeal for the Common Interest of Christianity at a Time, when too many, as the Apostle complains (*Phil. 2: 21*) seek their own things, not the things that are Jesus Christ. Bear with us therefore, we beseech you, whilst we expostulate the matter a little with you.

I. Is the Cause of Nonconformity (which we have espoused) good or not? If not, Why do we not renounce it? If it be, can we be indifferent whether it Thrive or Decay? Can we be contented, that our Posterity should be abandoned to such Impositions and Corruptions, both in Worship, and Discipline, as we cannot submit unto our selves? Are we sure we shall always enjoy our present Prosperity, whilst we make so little Provision for its Continuance? Or is there nothing, that might be done in Order for the securing it? Or can you, Brethren, say you have done sufficient already in proportion to what your Stations and Interests in the City have given you, of greater Advantages than others to promote and propagate our Common Concerns?

II. Are there not many of our Congregations Broken to pieces, or sunk, for want of Ministers to supply them? Are there not some supplied with such, whose Weakness and Unfitness on many Accounts exposes us to the scorn of our Enemies, and Pity of our Friends? And (as one cause of this) are there not many Clandestine Ordinations? Are not many Conniv'd at, who Preach for several Years without being Ordain'd; whereby not only many know not how to distinguish between Ministers regularly Ordain'd, and Gifted Brethren? But the Lord's Supper is shamefully grown into disuse, to the Dishonour of Christ, the Ruine of Souls, and our own Reproach.

III. Are we not more weak and inconsiderable now after 14 Years, Liberty than we were at first? And has our Liberty then been well improv'd? Are not several Parties in the Nation that at first were small, and despicable, now become Considerable and Numerous? And is it not from hence, because they have been closely Cemented together into



into one Body, and have jointly carried on their common Interest? And if we had used the like Methods, with proportionable Zeal and Diligence, had we not greater advantages of Improvement (both on the account of the Reasonableness of Our Principles and Practices, as well as on other accounts) than any others? We appeal to your own Judgments. And should they act with more Prudence and Zeal in an evil Cause, than we in a good?

IV. Do you not think, that the Advancement of the Nonconformist Interest would mightily conduce to the Common Good of our Native Country? Would it not tend to the Securing of the Protestant Interest more effectually at Home, and to the Strengthening it more abroad? Would it not in time probably produce (what our despicable Condition has hitherto in part hindered) some reasonable Overtures towards an Accommodation of Differences between the two greatest Parties in the Kingdom? Would not this, by the Union of so great a Number of the best Christians, be a likely means to put a Check to the growing Infidelity, Prophaneness, and Immorality of the present Age?

V. Is it a sufficient Discharge of the Trust committed to Us by Christ, to confine our Care of His Church to that small part, to which we are specially related as Pastors, and to take little or no Care what becomes of the rest; and that when we have great Opportunities and Advantages of doing very much? Should not all faithful Pastors rather do their utmost, by their united Counsels and Endeavours, for the Edification, Preservation, and Prosperity of the whole Flock, so far as within their reach? Has your laying aside your Weekly Meetings been consistent with this Obligation?

VI. Was the general Correspondence justly thought to be useful and necessary Four Years since? And are our Circumstances so much altered for the better now, as to make it useless, and of no Necessity? Are there not many Evils amongst us (besides those abovementioned) which want a speedy and effectual Remedy? And would  
not

not the Revival of that Correspondence, together with a regular, constant, and prudent Management of your Weekly Assembly, be the most likely Method to rectify this amiss? &c.

Thus, Brethren, we have with that sincerity, and plain dealing, which becomes us, Represented unto you some of our Thoughts about the present posture of our Affairs, and you may easily see hereby, what it is we desire of you, and Adjure you by the Lord Jesus Christ; to set about it with all speed, and so carry on with Constancy and Zeal for the Publick Good. Hereby you will revive the Decaying Interest of Holiness, and Concord amongst us. Hereby you will raise the drooping Spirits of us, and other of the Brethren throughout the Nation. Hereby you will procure to your selves a just veneration from all that count Jerusalem their cheif Joy. Lastly, in doing this you will enjoy the sweetest serenity of your own Breasts, and in a dying Hour will reflect with Triumph upon your hearty Endeavours to serve the Will of God in your Generations, and to secure the True Religion to your Posterity. — Much more we could say, for our Hearts are full. But we will now say no more, having plainly told you our Minds, your own Prudence will easily suggest what is farther to be done to answer the Expectations of your Brethren. We have done our Duty, we leave the Issue to God. With all Respects to you, worthy Brethren, we conclude, heartily Commending you to the Divine Blessing and Guidance, that you may do that, which shall be for the Honour of our Common Lord, the good of his Church, and your own Joy in the Day of our Lord Jesus.

*At our Monthly Meeting*

*at Colbrook Wednesday*

*the 4th, 1702.*

*Ja. Waters, Moderator.*



*Dress, does best become Her; and as she needs no Co-  
lours to set Her off, no Subtly to support Her, to She  
always suffers when the Colours are discovered to be not  
her own, and when Cris is discern'd in the Manage-*

# REMARKS

## On the Foregoing

# LETTER

*S. I. R,*  
**I** Have perus'd the Letter you left with me, and accord-  
ing to your Desire do now communicate to you such  
Remarks upon it as the Subject Matter naturally sug-  
gested to me.

You will easily observe, that I have not run into any  
remote Consequences, nor given my self a Liberty of say-  
ing any thing upon the several Clauses of it, but what the  
Words will fairly allow of. For I think it no less Imprudent  
than Unjust, to charge any Person higher than plain Occa-  
sion is given me to do; because laying on a greater Load  
than the matter will bear, takes off from the Weight of  
what is justly laid upon it, and when any thing is said more  
severely than the occasion given will admit of, we are in-  
clin'd to suspect, that the whole is aggravated, and no  
part of the Business so bad, as 'tis Represented.

The Interest of Truth is always best serv'd with Sim-  
plicity and Sincerity: A fair Representation, like a plain  
Dress,

Dress, does best become Her; and as she needs no Colours to set Her off, no Subtilty to support Her, so She always suffers when the Colours are discover'd to be not her own, and when Craft is discern'd in the Management of her Cause.

These are the Reasons which induc'd me to present you the following Remarks in this manner, that I might not prejudice the Cause I would serve, and that I might exactly observe that Justice, which is due to the Words and Actions of every Man, in a fair Interpretation of them.

The Substance of the Lettter is an Earnest Request of some Nonconforming Teachers in the Country, to their Brethren in *London*, that they would Heartily and Zealously joyn together in the Promoting their Common Interest: And also an Expostulation with them about their Coldness and Indifference in it.

The Methods propos'd for carrying on their Cause, are a Revival, a Project, which is call'd an Excellent and Noble Project of a general Correspondence: (*Letter Page 1.*) And the renewing their Weekly Meetings, both which had been discontinued: The general Correspondence intirely; and the Weekly Meetings in a great measure. (*Let. Pag. 2.*)

You see through the whole course of the Letter, how great a stress they lay upon these Two Points, and not only how Effectual, but also how indispensably necessary to their Interest they Esteem them, as if they knew no other Means suitable to that Important End: You will observe how from this Perswasion they have been frequent upon the same Subject, and have often exhorted their *London* Brethren to put these things in a vigorous Execution: And you will also observe how backward their *London* Brethren have been in complying with their Importunate Desires, tho they were the first (*L. P. 2.*) Formers of that Project, and the Persons who first propos'd it to their Brethren in the Country. And so at first, you find, they were hearty in their own Proposal; but in a little time their Zeal abated,



abated, the Correspondence (*L. P. 3.*) dropt; and though they were once awaken'd afterwards, yet they soon fell back into their former slumber. (*L. P. 3.*)

This Remark will be understood, I suppose, in favour of the *London* Teachers, and interpreted as an Argument of a more quiet Spirit. And since they are so particularly charg'd with Remissness and Negligence in these great Points, so far as they have been Remiss, so far they ought to be Esteemed towards Us Peaceable, and Moderate. For I think it too Rigid to enquire upon what Principles they are so, and though few will believe it is out of Good Will to Us, yet it may perhaps be allow'd to proceed from Prudential Considerations with Reference to themselves. But whatever is the Cause, I take it to be a very Equitable Rule to pass the best Construction upon every Action, and to allow it its just Commendation, as it outwardly appears, when we are ignorant of the Principles from whence it flows.

But after this allowance you must necessarily take notice, How Warm and Zealous their Brethren in the Country are: How Active and Indefatigable in carrying on, in supporting, and strengthening their Interest throughout the Nation.

Now this will more evidently appear from the several Heads of their Expostulation with their *London* Brethren.

I. The first Head is put in form of a Dilemma, and the Issue of it is this. *That if the Cause of Nonconformity be not Good, they ought to renounce it; but if it be good, they ought Vigorously to promote it, and not be cold, and indifferent in it.* (*Let. Pag. 4.*) Now upon supposition of the goodness of their Cause, they propose this Material Question.

*Can we be contented our Posterity should be abandon'd to such Impositions and Corruptions, both in Worship and Discipline, as we can't submit unto our selves?* Which is as much as to say, that they ought not to be so contented, and if resolv'd into a Proposition, imports a plain Negative, by changing the Notes of Interrogation into a direct Negation. Which is an Observation you will once for all car-

ry through all their Questions, which being put with a Negative, always imply the Affirmative, and without a Particle of Negation in them always imply the Negative.

In this Argument, which they use with their *London Brethren*, are several things Remarkable.

I. An Entire and full Persuasion, that themselves have no Corruptions or sinful Impositions, either in Worship or Discipline.

II. That it is absolutely Unlawful, to comply with our Worship and Discipline.

III. And that it is incumbent on their Consciences, to secure their Posterity from a Compliance with them.

I. They must suppose their own Worship and Discipline to be entirely free from Corruption, or their Argument would not be good in respect of Ours. For it must be as much duty to secure their Posterity from Corruption among themselves, as it can be to guard them against it with respect to us.

Now such an Assurance as to themselves is not to be taken up, but upon a sincere reflection on their own Worship and Discipline, and the most Mature deliberation whether in all Points they be really free from Corruption. And considering, that there is hardly one Instance either in their Worship or Discipline, but what is justly controverted, and in many particulars prov'd to have no Foundation in Scripture, or in Antiquity consonant to Scripture; they ought certainly to be more Modest in their Opinions, and not pronounce themselves in the Right, when to any indifferent Person there is so great an Appearance, and to Us, who can examine things to the bottom, so plain a Demonstration, that they are in the Wrong.

I shall only mention their Ordinations, on the Validity of which the regularity both of their Worship and Discipline depends.

As to that Point therefore the Case stands fairly thus.

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We say, that for 1500 Years together, the Church knew none but Episcopal Ordinations. This we Appeal to as a matter of Fact not to be contradicted. Now in this Case the Scriptures can do our Adversaries no service, because Apostolical Practice is so rigid an Interpretation of them, that no Man can bend them to any other sense, than that imposes on them. For if the Apostles, according to their Commission and Authority receiv'd from Christ, did from the first reserve the Power of Ordination to themselves; and if afterwards, upon the Encrease of Christianity, and the multiplying of Churches, they consecrated particular Persons to Ordain Elders in them: And if it can be shewed that this Practice continued Universally in the Catholick Church for 1500 Years; if the Succession in several Churches is Recorded, and we can tell who succeeded in several after the Apostles and their immediate Successors; in short, if in all Ages from the Apostles we find Bishops originally Empower'd by the Apostles in the Government of all Churches, superior to Presbyters, and Exercising direct Authority over them; and if in no Age till the Beginning of the 16th Century we find Episcopal Government laid aside in any Churches, then it is plain, that confounding the Names of Bishops and Presbyters can be of no use, because they were more substantially distinguish'd in Office and Jurisdiction.

Nor can it be of any Moment to produce some few Instances of Presbyterial Ordinations in so long a Tract of Time; because they are in all Reason rather to be look'd upon, as Violations of the Churches Rule, than Precedents fit to be followed by succeeding Ages.

So that from hence it will follow from the whole, that the Nonconforming Teachers among us, lye under two Insuperable Difficulties.

1. They have no ground in Scripture for the Validity of their Ordinations, considered as Presbyterial in general.

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2. They have much less Warrant for them, consider'd as deriv'd in many Instances from Persons, who never at any Hand had any Ordination themselves.

Now from hence it will follow further

1. That their Ordinations are a manifest Corruption of Primitive Practice, and, if it be necessary to observe Apostolical Usage, not Valid.

2. That this derives an Irregularity upon their Worship and Discipline, and diffuses Corruption thro' the whole. For when the Fountain is Corrupted, the Streams that flow from it must be so too.

Here perhaps it may be imagin'd, that they will advance the Plea of the Reform'd Churches abroad, and urge Necessity for running into this Way.

But in this case they are wholly precluded, and have no Title to that Plea.

1. For, first, they chuse this way as most regular, and must therefore acknowledge themselves out of the right Course, before they can make any Apology for being in the Wrong.

2. Nor, Secondly, is there any Proportion between the Corruptions pretended in our Worship, and those that are really in the Church of *Rome*, from which the Reformed Churches and our selves separated; and therefore the Plea of Necessity is ill offer'd by them, even with a general Respect to their Separation from us.

And this will be evident if we consider the second thing Remarkable in the Argument they use, and that is,

II. A full Perswasion that it is absolutely Unlawful to comply with our Worship and Discipline.

This also they must suppose, or their Argument drawn from that Care they ought to have of their Posterity, in securing them from the Corruptions they believe among us, would be of no force at all. They can't abandon their Posterity to such Impositions and Corruptions, both in Worship and Discipline, as they can't submit unto themselves. Now 'tis an absolute Perswasion of Sin in

our



our Worship and Discipline, which is the Reason they can't submit unto them; or else their Separation could have no pretence: And it is from this Absolute Perswasion which themselves have, that they think themselves so strictly oblig'd to secure their Posterity.

Now I shall grant, that such a Perswasion may be a Reason for their own Separation.

But I cannot grant, that such a Perswasion can lay any Obligation on them with Respect to their Children in this Matter:

Because, nothing less than a clear Evidence, (which I shall shew is impossible to be had) that the Terms of our Communion are unlawful, and directly sinful, can justify them to themselves in Educating their Children in a continual Separation from the Establish'd Church.

For if their Perswasion of the Corruptions in our Worship and Discipline, be no more than scruple, that can only affect themselves, and can never lay an Obligation on them to propagate it to others. He that is only Scrupulous, dares not indeed to do the thing he Scruples, but then, he will never condemn in another, what he Scruples in himself; for Scruples rise from Weakness and a Tenderness of Conscience, and those that have them therefore, may very well suppose, that their Brother's Conscience is better inform'd, and allows of those Actions, concerning which they doubt. They may believe an Action to be Lawful, which to them has another Appearance, and therefore they may permit that in another, which they cannot in themselves. From whence it follows, that not Scruples, but a full Evidence of the Sinfulness of holding Communion with us, can justify the Presbyterians, and acquit them to their own Consciences, in bringing up their Children in the Principles of Separation. Now Evidence and Scruple about the same thing, are Incompatible: a contradiction in Terms, and Impossible; so that wherever there can be prov'd a Deficiency of Evidence concerning any matter of Conscience, there the Person who is thus deficient in his Proof, can be no more than Scrupulous in the

the Point, if he will act in Proportion to his Evidence, or else he must fall under a worse Character, than that of being Scrupulous, if he will act with all the Assurance of Knowledge upon insufficient grounds. So that though nothing less than a full Evidence, that the Terms of our Communion are Sinful, will justify the Presbyterians Practice in the Education of their Children; yet this, when truly consider'd, will be found, whenever pretended to, an insufficient Plea, because it is impossible they should have so clear an Evidence of the sinfulness of our Communion, as will justify their continuing the Separation to Posterity.

For as to the Discipline of our Church, they must prove its Government on which the Discipline depends, as they formerly term'd it, Antichristian; which is a Task, I suppose, they will not very readily undertake.

And as for our Worship, they must point out what they call Corruptions, and such Impositions in it, as themselves can't submit unto; and when they have done this, they must prove that no Man with a good Conscience can submit unto them. For if they may be submitted to by any Persons, and if those shall be guilty of no Sin by their submission, then the utmost Perswasion others can have of the Unlawfulness of them, can only concern themselves, but can lay no obligation on them with Respect to their Children, but that, which it most strictly does, of bringing them up in full Communion with the Establish'd Church.

It will be proper therefore to consider the principal Points objected against in our Worship; but because it will be too tedious to run thro' all; I shall confine to those against which the greatest Exceptions have been taken, and they are the Cross in Baptism, and the Kneeling at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

But when the Cross is declared not Essential to Baptism, and the Reason of its use fully set forth in the using of it, we must certainly conclude, that whatever Apprehensions some Persons may have of it, others may lawfully use it, and



and Parents suffer the Sign of it upon their Children, without any Note of Superstition.

And for Kneeling at the Sacrament, after our Church has taken such Care to prevent and remove all Scruples from the most tender Consciences in so full a Declaration, that no Worship is intended to be paid to the Bread and Wine, after she has expressed her self so directly against Transubstantiation, and so openly professed that the Elements are not changed by being Consecrated, it should seem not only Unreasonable, but highly Immodest, still to charge her with Idolatry after so ample satisfaction in the Point.

But when all is done, if it be allow'd that the Members of our Church may receive the Bread and Wine Kneeling, without paying any Adoration to them, then it must be allow'd, that they may receive them Kneeling without Idolatry; and certainly there is no Necessity laid upon any one to Adore the Bread and Wine, when he receives them Kneeling.

If this Rite therefore may be comply'd with without Idolatry, it may be submitted to without Sin; and therefore those only are oblig'd to abstain, who think they must be guilty of Idolatry in complying with it; but others are wholly unconcern'd with their Perswasions, nor can their Consciences reproach them for doing what another thinks Unlawful to be done. The same may be said of every thing else, which they except against.

And now, unless they can prove that no Man can use that thing lawfully, which they think unlawful, as in the Case of the Cross, and Kneeling at the Sacrament, unless they can prove that Point, they can never be under any Obligation of securing their Posterity against what they call Corruptions, and such Impositions, as themselves can't submit unto.

Now this is a Point impossible to be prov'd. Because 'tis telling me, I am Guilty of Idolatry suppose, when I, who best know my own Conscience, can more assuredly tell such a one that I am not. 'Tis telling the Church she

she requires Adoration of the Bread and Wine, when she has expressly declared she does not; and 'tis telling her Members that they do adore them, when they solemnly profess that they do not.

To conclude this Head therefore. Let it once for all be considered, that themselves have acknowledged Lay-Communion with us Lawful, and therefore they are so far from being oblig'd to Propagate the Separation, that they are as solemnly bound, as they can be to any Duty, plainly to tell their People, that they ought to Conform, to Leave their separate Congregations, and attend constantly upon the Church.

III. And now as to the Third thing Remarkable in their Argument, and the very Subject of it;

That it is incumbent on their Consciences to secure their Posterity from a compliance with our Worship and Discipline.

I think I may, from what has been said, make a direct Inference to the contrary. That they are oblig'd in Conscience to let their Children grow up in that Communion, which they can't submit unto themselves. For, as it has been prov'd, the Corruptions and Impositions conceiv'd in our Worship and Discipline, can affect them only, who are so perswaded of them, but can be of no concernment to others, who are satisfied in their Consciences about them: An Action is not to me less lawful, because another condemns it, and the Children may innocently do those things, which their Parents thought unlawful to be done.

As to the Remaining part of this Expostulation, I shall briefly run it over, and be also as short as possible upon the Rest.

The next Question they ask their Brethren, is, whether *they are sure they shall always enjoy* (Let. Pag. 4) *their present Prosperity?*

By the Date of the Letter, you see, it was writ in the close of King *William's* Reign of Glorious Memory: And I would observe, that there is nothing in this Question, but



but a general doubt of their Prosperity with respect to the instability of Humane Affairs, nothing that can particularly be interpreted as a doubt of their condition after his decease. For it was writ but Four Days before the King died, and they could not at that time be ignorant of the great Declension of his Health, yet we do not find them in any Alarm at it.

But in Answer to their Question, if they will take the Advice, which I do most sincerely offer them, as reasonable at all times; the best way to ensure their present Prosperity (for it is still continued to them) is to be Quiet, and Peaceable, under the Toleration they enjoy; and I hope they always will enjoy it as long as there is a Dissenter left among us.

For if they place their Prosperity in the Toleration the Laws have given them, they need never fear the discontinuance of it, while they so behave themselves, as that the Peace and Establishment of the Nation, shall not be endanger'd by the Liberties they may allow themselves under the shelter of that Protection.

But if they place their Prosperity in their Numbers, and measure it by the strength and greatness of their Party, I think them much mistaken in their Politicks; and what they imagine will be for their Advancement, may prove the occasion of their Fall. And the Nation may at the last be thoroughly awaken'd, and take such Measures with them, as may make them sensible, that tho' the Government Tolerates them, it does not intend to Establish them, but expects they should be contented and thankful to enjoy their Toleration without endangering the Establish'd Church.

So that the next Questions will be wholly needless on this Head, and they will rather see occasion to commend the Prudence, than blame the Remisness of their London Brethren.

II. The Second Head of Expostulation relates to the breaking their Congregations for want of Teachers: To the Weakness of some of their Teachers: To clandestine

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Ordinations: And to many who Preach to some Congregations for several Years without being Ordain'd, which occasions the disuse of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper among them.

These being matters which relate wholly to themselves, I shall say but little to them, only concerning their abuse of Ordinations I would observe;

1. That we believe those who are Ordain'd among them, and those who Preach without Ordination, are equally Authorized to their Office.

2. That they connive at Gifted Brethren Preaching in their Congregations, and that it seems, in such Numbers, as the Letter tells in this Head of Expostulation, 'tis hard to know those who are regularly Ordain'd, from Gifted Brethren. Now this is so manifest a Corruption both in Worship and Discipline, as they shall never be able to object to us.

3. I would observe, that departing from Apostolical Practice in one Point, makes them also transgress it in many others: The want of Teachers makes Room for gifted Brethren, and gifted Brethren occasions other disorders; but might not this want of Teachers be supplied, if their Deacons were Ordain'd to their Primitive Office of Baptizing and Preaching? And tho' we should not think their Ordination Valid, yet they who believe they have power to Ordain, should Ordain Deacons to the same Office the Apostles did, or they lose an Order plainly Instituted by the Apostles. Which is such another Corruption, as they shall never find in the Church of *England*.

III. To their Third head of Expostulation, I shall say something more. The subject matter of which is.

1. That they are grown weaker by Fourteen Years Liberty: This assign'd to their neglect, in not improving their Liberty.

2. That other Sects, once small and despicable, are now grown Numerous and Considerable, by being unanimously Zealous in carrying on their common Interest.

3. That



3. That the Presbyterians, by using the same methods, had greater Advantages of improving their Interest, both on the account of the reasonableness of their Principles and Practices, as well as on other Accounts.

Whereupon they conclude that Head with asking, whether others should shew more Prudence and Zeal in an Evil Cause than they in a Good?

1. As to the First I am no competent Judge, whether they are grown weaker or stronger since the Toleration: I do not in the least repine at the liberty which for so many Years they have enjoyed, and shall always give my Voice for the continuance of it, as long as there remains a scrupulous Conscience in the Nation. But then I cannot think it reasonable, a Toleration should be allow'd to any thing but what is purely matter of Conscience, not to any Practices of improving their Interest, and Propagating their Separation; for this I have prov'd they can be under no obligation to do even with respect to their Children, who are indifferent to any Communion, much less in respect of our Members, to draw them off from us, who are already settled in our Church. But certainly as our Laws have provided against the seducing our Members to Popery, so as long as we are so fully satisfied of the lawfulness, and in some Points of the absolute necessity of our present Worship and Discipline, we may very reasonably expect, that some provision be also made against seducing our Members to separate Congregations: Not in the same Way. God forbid I should have such a thought, but sure it can't be thought unreasonable that some Moderation be given to such a Practice, whose consequences must be pernicious, and which can never make any pretence either to Conscience or Toleration.

2. As for other Sects being grown Considerable, they must remember, that themselves rose from as small beginnings as any, and nothing so much contributed to the Rise and Progress of every Sect among us, as the Original separation of the Presbyterians from us, and those fatal Wars and Distractions, which first under a Presbyterian,

and afterwards under an Independent Government, multiplied them so fatally upon us: But now for many Years they have most of them been at a stand, and have had no remarkable Accessions, but what they may have severally gain'd from one another: They have made no Profelytes considerable either for Number or Quality from our Church; but as far as ever I could observe, one Sect has generally procreated another, and their respective Encrease and Diminution have been confin'd within themselves. So that how industrious soever any Sect may be in advancing its particular Interest, we look upon that only, as we do on the acquisitions of the Sea, which always loses in one place, what it gains in another.

But the Presbyterians which we account the Sect that most immediately separates from us, we look upon with another Eye: And in the case of Separation, it is observable, that the Controversy for the most part has been manag'd with them alone. For those, who fall off from our Church, generally fall off first to them, tho' afterwards, like Meat, they go down into the Belly, only like that are not cast out into the draught, but separated by the various Meanders and Windings, the intricate Errors through which they pass into the several Humours, that compose the other Sects. Since therefore the first deviation from our Church, is first made to the Presbyterians, we have reason, when they talk of being Industrious and Zealous in promoting their common Interest, to think our selves more nearly touch'd; not that it is the goodness of their Cause which we think endangers us. (For with a general respect to the Church, the cause of all Separatists is alike) but they seem nearer to the Church in Faith, than others, unless the Independents may be excepted, and People who do not understand the great Obligation that lies upon them to preserve the Peace and Unity of the Church; are easily seduc'd thereby; especially when 'tis speciously represented to them, that the Faith professed is the same, but the Worship much more pure, and the Preaching more Soul-



Soul-saving and Edifying in the Conventicle, than in the Church.

3. The Advantages the Presbyterians may think they have above others, upon the account of the Reasonableness of their Principles and Practices, will prove a precarious Supposition. For as to their Practices, should they be as industrious, as they say the other Sects are, in promoting their common Interest, wherein, I pray, would their Practices be more reasonable, than those of others? And as for their Principles, in all such Points as they differ in from us, they are as diametrically opposite to us, as any other Sect can be. In matters of Faith, they say, they agree with us, and are so far guilty of many fewer Absurdities, than the wilder Separatists. But in other Points they are as unreasonable, and indeed more unreasonable in separating from us than others, because a Pretence of Faith is always a better Reason for separation, than any that can be alledg'd from the Worship and Discipline of our Church.

So that upon the whole, I see no Advantage they have, but their agreement in Faith with us, and that Advantage can never be made use of; but the unreasonableness of their Practices, will contradict the reasonableness of their Principles; but as to the real Service the reasonableness of their Practices and Principles may do them, I have already spoken to it in allowing, that an agreement with us in Faith is a great snare to those, who do not rightly apprehend the great obligation they are under, to maintain the Peace and Unity of the Church.

I might have treated their Principles and Practices in another way, and have observed to you what their Principles are, and what their Practices; but I am satisfied to have examin'd them only with relation to their separating from us; and if I have not made them appear unreasonable, 'tis an easy matter to do it beyond Contradiction. Enough I hope has been said, and I am not willing to be more severe in my Remarks, than impartiality requires me to be.]

I shall only say a Word to the Question they ask, whether others should be more Prudent and zealous in an Evil cause, than they in a Good? That they ought to be well assured of the Goodness of their Cause. Its being Old is no Argument on their side, and when they have own'd Lay-Communion lawful, 'twill be hard for them to reconcile the Goodness of our Cause, and their own at the same time; but for a fuller Answer to this I refer you to what I have said under the first Head of Expostulation, and from thence, and several other Passages, it will appear, that they are requir'd neither to be Prudent nor Zealous in carrying on their Cause.

IV. The Fourth Head of Expostulation I shall take just as the several Queries lie before me.

The first is very extraordinary.

1. *Do not you think the Advancement of the Nonconforming Interest would mightily conduce to the common good of our Native Country?* (Let. Pag. 5.)

Here one might be tempted to ask several Questions, but I demand only,

1. What is there in Nonconformity more than in the Establish'd Church, that has so sure an Influence on the common Good of England?

2. When the Nonconforming Interest was prevalent, did it then so mightily conduce to our Countrys common Good?

3. Because the Question seems to be very curious, we shall be glad to know in what Particulars the advancement of the Nonconforming Interest would be Effectual to so desirable an End.

2. They ask, whether the Advancement of that Interest, would not tend to the securing the Protestant Interest more effectually at Home, and to the strengthening it more Abroad?

1. But with respect to the Protestant Interest abroad, let them show why the Church of England is not as strong a support to it, as they can pretend to be.

2. In the Reign of the late King James, when Popery, like a Torrent, was rushing in upon us, who then were found



found the best security of the Protestant Interest at Home? And who more vigorously Stemm'd the Tide, they, or the Divines of the Church of *England*?

And I cannot help observing upon this occasion the great unreasonableness of the Nonconformists, in representing Dangers of Popery from our Quarters, when we have given them so full a Demonstration of our distance from it, and zeal against it: A Zeal that did not spend it self in vain and Idle exclamations, but in a substantial Refutation of Popish Errors, and a Constancy not to be shaken by all the Threats or Favours of a Crown. For certainly our Divines did then put their Lives in their Hands, they stood manfully in the Gap, when among all our Dissenters, scarce more than one was found of Courage and Honesty enough to engage in such a Cause: That Cause most assuredly was good. Why did not their Consciences oblige them *then* to appear in its defence, *then* to be concern'd for their Posterity, *then* to secure them from so manifest Corruptions, such intolerable Impositions, as were then ready to be laid upon them?

Such supporters were they in those Times of the Protestant Interest both at Home and Abroad!

Thus when our Church was Exterminated as Popish and Antichristian, when her Sons were depriv'd, and Imprison'd, or scatter'd abroad upon the same pretence, even then did the Episcopal Divines confront the Romish Doctrines, and with unanswerable Learning support the Reform'd Religion: They converted those who had been brought up in the Church of *Rome*: They rais'd the laps'd, and confirm'd the wavering, while their Adversaries were silent in the Cause; while they neglected Popery, unquestionably such, and exclaim'd against it there only where it was not to be found. (*See Bishop Anderson's first Preface to his Sermons, Sect. 17.*)

Even to this Day let them produce the Volumes they have writ in defence of the Faith which they profess: Let them produce their Volumes against Idolatry and Superstition flagrant in the Church of *Rome*: Let them tell the Nation what they have done against the common Enemy;

my; or let them gratefully acknowledge, that the Sons of the Church of *England* have always withstood every Attempt of Popery, and have preserv'd the Nation from all the Arts and Sophistry of *Rome*.

From hence let them learn what weak Supports they have been, even when they had overthrown the Popery imagin'd in the Church of *England*, and triumph'd in its Ruines. Let them remember, they have always declin'd the Combat with the proper Enemy. They have weaken'd the Protestant Interest by their unreasonable Divisions, they never strengthen'd it by their Writings.

3. I come now to their third Question, where they must pardon me if I deal plainly and freely with them, and say any thing upon it which they will not be pleas'd to hear; themselves have given me most just Occasion for the most impartial Remarks: and to set their Purposes in such a light, as themselves have disclos'd them in. The Question runs thus: *Would not It (the Advancement of that Interest) in time probably produce (what our despicable Condition has hitherto in part hinder'd) some reasonable Overtures towards an Accommodation of Differences between the two greatest Parties in the Kingdom?* Let. P. 5.

Here I would observe, that how inconsiderable and weak foever they have, in several parts of this Letter, represented themselves; yet even here, where they mention their despicable Condition, they own themselves *One of the Two* most considerable Parties in this Kingdom.

I would observe further, That it is very improper to call an Establish'd Church a Party: For Party, in the Propriety of the Word in all Languages, implies Faction; and Faction can never be imply'd in the Notion of any Establishment, that has been quietly and peaceably settled by the Laws of any Country, and made an essential part of the Constitution.

So that these Names of Distinction, that have been so invidiously thrown upon us, are wholly impertinent with a general Reference to the Church, and no further to be accounted for, than it can be shew'd, that any Members



of the Church do under her Name carry on designs, which neither her Principles nor Practices allow of. And of this I have never seen any other proof, with a general respect to the Church, but Calumny: as to some hot Spirits among us, it will be hard measure to make the Church accountable, either for their shameful rudeness and disrespect to Government on the one hand, or their Intemperate ungovern'd Zeal on the other.

But if the Church must be called a Party, because she is willing to maintain her Establishment, and not recede from a Constitution so excellently temper'd, in Faith so Orthodox, and in Worship and Discipline so Primitive and Apostolical; then she must be contented to bear the Name, rather than by throwing down her Fences and opening her Enclosures, by breaking up her Mounds, and dismantling her Strength, to let in upon her self those Troops of Error, Heresie, and Confusion, which like the barbarous Inundations of the old Northern People, would suddenly overwhelm her.

I come now to the matter of the Question, which, without doing them any wrong, may, I hope, be resolv'd into this:

That their desire is to grow so Considerable, that some reasonable Overtures may be made on our Parts towards an accommodation with them.

But they would do well to consider, that from a peculiar fondness for themselves, and their own Opinions, Men are not always competent Judges of what is Reasonable or Unreasonable: Here we have a plain declaration of their sense, and it stands Recorded by the uninterrupted continuance of the Separation, that in all Overtures, which have hitherto been made, they have always gone away dissatisfied with the Offers made them: From whence we may conclude, that all steps formerly taken towards an Accommodation with them, would be in vain repeated.

When People are unreasonable in their demands, it is no wonder they are not satisfied. And if this Church

must be censur'd as an Enemy to Peace, and Hard to Tender Consciences, because she can't make Concessions destructive of her self, upon any Argument for the Edification of others; let those who censure her, rather reflect upon themselves, and remember, that reasonable Overtures will never satisfie unreasonable Expectations.

As far as ever I could see into the Pretensions of the Nonconformists, and understand the main Articles they requir'd, as Conditions of their conforming, I found them such as were utterly inconsistent with the very Being of our Church as Apostolical in its Government, at once destroying the great distinction of Orders in it, and depriving the Governours of it, of that Power which the Bishops of the Church have ever claim'd and exercis'd from the Apostles Days even down to the present Times. I do not by this intend any more than that the Bishops by the Word of God have Authority to bear Rule in his Church, to determine of things undetermin'd by the Scripture, for the well ordering and benefit of the Church; and that they have a direct Superiority to Presbyters, as an Order distinct from them, and plac'd in the Apostles Room above them.

Now in all the Treaties that have been between us, upon the Subject of Accommodation, they have always insisted on a reduction of Episcopacy, by A. Bp. *Usher's* Model, which Model, had it left Episcopacy in its Institution, might have met with a readier Compliance in the manner propos'd for the exercise of Episcopal Jurisdiction. But when the Order is levell'd, and the Bishop only a Presbyter in Precedency, a further Progress towards Concord would be in vain, unless we would yeild our Bishops to be no more than Presbyters in Order, equal in that respect, and superior only in Degree.

But farther, they have constantly insisted on the Validity of Orders receiv'd at the hands of Presbyters among themselves, which we look upon as an open Usurpation of Episcopal Power, and an act they had no Authority to presume upon. The Reformed Churches abroad always acknowledged



knowledg'd themselves out of the right way, and pleaded Necessity for the Innovation. Their Plea has always been accepted, and tho' we do not say, Necessity fully makes up the defect of their Ordination, so as that they are Ministers according to our Saviours Institution, yet we allow the Plea, and believe God will give his Blessing to their Ministry, as far as his Providence has laid that Necessity upon them.

But those who insist upon the Validity of Presbyterial Ordination among us, go upon far different Principles: They urge it as most agreeable to Scripture, and therefore not to be receded from: And tho' they were for Episcopacy in the Name, (some of the more Learned I mean) yet this was consistent enough with their Scheme, who look upon Bishops to be in reality no more than Presbyters.

So that to have yeilded the validity of their Ordinations, had been to have given up the Cause of Episcopacy, and fix'd a perpetual Comment on their Notion of the thing.

We could not look on the Form of Church Government, or on Episcopacy, as things indifferent; and therefore when these were demanded in such a manner, we could not without violating our Consciences give way to the demand.

They requir'd moreover, that all things of an indifferent Nature, meaning the Ceremonies of the Church, as they should be reform'd, might be thenceforth left at Pleasure.

Now this directly impeach'd the Authority of the Church, and our Members, tho' they might be willing to remove the things most scrupled by them, could not take them away as Sinful, which was also included in their demand; nor could they with any regard to Decency and Order agree that the Remaining Ceremonies should not be enjoy'd.

As to the Reformation of the Liturgy, Mr. Baxter undertook it, and tho' the Substance of several Prayers was

incorporated, yet the whole was so much alter'd, that it carry'd another Face, and was hardly to be known, by those who were formerly acquainted with it. The Reform'd Liturgy is Extant, and comparing it with the Old, will be the best way to discern the difference. The Prayers were greatly lengthen'd, and if a Form be tiresome, made much more tedious. The Responses were struck out, and the People had no room for saying any thing but *Amen*. The observation of Holy-Days, was abolish'd, and the Kalender suffered a thorow Reformation.

Now it might be thought reasonable, to have mended only the excepted Passages, without transforming the whole, and modest at least, to have doubted of the Perfection of their own Work.

However 600 Alterations in it were made by our Divines; and the Liturgy, as at present receiv'd among us, has been so justly celebrated by many excellent Pens, that it only can be said, they have fall'n short in their commendation of it.

Now upon the whole of this matter, when People make demands with so little Reason, we have great Reason not to comply with them. And when they ask things, which they must know, that upon our Principles we cannot grant, whatever they may pretend of their desires of Peace, and Union, 'tis they stop up the Way, and make Accommodation impracticable.

And now that they may not any more pretend to Concord, and sow the Seeds of Difference in the greatest steps they take to Concord, I will venture to tell them, that whatever variations may be made in things of an indifferent Nature, we shall never alter all those things, which they esteem indifferent. Particularly,

This Church will always perform her publick Worship by some publick Form of Prayer, and Thanksgiving; and however the present Liturgy may be alter'd, it will never be abolish'd, till they can find more reasonable exceptions against it, or offer a better in its Room.

And



And then for Episcopacy, (whatever some few of our Divines have said) we esteem it of right Apostolical, and consequently of Divine: Presbytery also we esteem of right Divine, but then we so esteem it only, where it is rightly Constituted. And what is of Divine Institution, can be revers'd by no Humane Authority. The Ministers appointed by *Christ*, were to continue perpetual in his Church, and as Himself instituted two Orders with different Powers and Authority, so that distinction is for ever to remain to succeeding Ages: To the Apostles he committed the full power of Governing the Church after his Ascension: To the Seventy, a Power subordinate to theirs; and Remarkable it is, that succeeding Ministers were Ordain'd by the Apostles only, Churches form'd by them alone: Others were partakers of their Ministry in Preaching the Word, in Converting numbers to the Faith, but all acts of Power and Jurisdiction were exercis'd by them; as is most undeniable from the History of their Acts, and several Passages especially in *St. Paul's Epistles*.

By this Power they instituted the Order of Deacons, giving them Authority to Baptize, and to preach the Word: We find not that any besides the Apostles pretended to this Power, nor do we read that any Body of Presbyters ever took upon them to Ordain any to their own Order: But *St. Paul*, we see, (and by his Practice we may certainly collect that of the other Apostles) exercis'd this Authority in its full Latitude and Extent: He us'd it himself, and confer'd it upon others, peculiarly Consecrating *Timothy* and *Titus*, who before were Elders, to Ordain Elders in those Churches over which he plac'd them, and to have Jurisdiction over them, that so none might be sent irregularly into the Vineyard of the Lord.

Now if these Orders were Instituted by our Saviour and his Apostles, and if none have Authority to Minister in Holy things, but those who derive it from *Christ* Originally thro' the Hands of the Apostles and their Successors in all Ages of the World, then can we never Recede from the Episcopal Government of our Church, and from the

the Powers lodg'd with particular Persons for the constant continuance of these three Orders in it, without violating our Saviours Institution, and invalidating our Ministry for ever.

If this be what they expect from us, we can suffer for our refusal, and perhaps without a Toleration. This Church is ready to do any thing for Peace, which will not destroy her self: Things of an indifferent nature, she would cheerfully part with for the purchase of that Precious Jewel, could she be assur'd she should attain her end, and not be expos'd to continual Changes, and a more unsettled Condition by it.

But then, are no Advances to be made on their side? must we yield all to them, and will they in nothing comply with us? If they sincerely intend an Union with us, let them show how far they can Conform. I do not intend to propose so hard measure to them, as the coming to our Churches, because tho' they may have no objection against many things, yet they may scruple others; but I would recommend to them an Effectual way to Peace and Union with us, that they would introduce into their own Congregations so much of our Worship, as they do not except against; and then we shall see how far they will comply, and what their Expectations from us are.

Else considering that all Proposals have hitherto been unsuccessful, and in their Judgment not reasonable, we may without breach of Charity conclude, that at what time soever the Nonconforming Interest is advanc'd to that Pitch they aim at, Overtures will be needless on our side, when the reasonableness of them shall be decided by those, who at such a time will Judge, and Carve, and lay out for themselves.

I might bestow some Words to make them sensible of the unwariness of that Expression; I might tell them, 'tis ill with a Prince, who is oblig'd to make Overtures to his Rebels. We know the success, when things come to that extremity. We remember, when no Overtures could save the Church; and tho' we hope, we shall never be so  
unreasona-



unreasonably and severely treated any more, yet we can never think our Establishment long, when we shall find our selves concern'd to make such Overtures, as our Adversaries shall judge reasonable, who have never esteemed any so, that we have ever offer'd.

The last Enquiry under this Head is this:

4. Whether obtaining the End mention'd in the former, *Would not by the Union of so great a Number of the best Christians, be a likely means to put a Check to the growing Infidelity, Prophaneness, and Immorality of the present Age?*

And indeed I believe it would put a considerable stop to the growth of Atheism and Infidelity, and be an excellent means of Reforming the dissolute Manners of the Age. For nothing gives so great an occasion to these things as our Divisions; The Atheist from observing several Opinions obstinately contended for, believes them all to be wrong: And the Debauchee eludes the Churches Laws, by taking shelter in a Conventicle. If therefore our Union be effectual to the giving a Check to these Evils, we must take care to Unite in such a manner, as will best secure us against future Divisions.

Now the Presbyterians may observe, that they, from the first times of their Separation, have been the ground whence every other Sect has sprung: I do not know of any second separation made, but among those who were already separated from us: And the Brownists, and Quakers, &c. rose up among those, who were already gone away and had estrang'd themselves from the Church. One Sect has commonly multiplied into many; and Men having once left our Communion, become unfixt and unstable in every thing, but a purpose of not returning to us.

Since therefore the Presbyterians are the seed of our Divisions, the Original whence they are all deriv'd, they will always be found an improper Fence against them. The Inference from hence is so obvious, that I need not mention it. For when it is true in Fact, that one Separation has divided into many, and that their own Writers have

have complain'd that Errors, Heresies, and the wildest Sects encreas'd among them under their Government without Number, beyond any proportion to what was known, while the Discipline of the Church remain'd in the Bishops Hands; when themselves acknowledge this in frequent and publick Complaints to their Parliament, they do not only show the fatal Consequences of their Separation, but do also demonstrate how ineffectual a Presbyterian Model is to prevent Divisions, and how much better secured the Nation was under the Episcopal Government and Discipline of the Church.

V. The 5th Head of Expostulation relating wholly to the care they ought to take of the Flock in general, as well as of those particular parts more immediately under their respective Care as Pastors of them, I shall not dwell long upon it.

For whether by the Flock they mean those only of their own Perswasion, or whether they extend it to all Christians in the Nation, I have already consider'd their Obligation in this Point; only I shall add, that with respect to their own People, as far as both Teacher and People are truly sincere and conscientious in their Separation, so far they do well in consulting the Edification of their People, by instructing them to live Soberly, Righteously, and Godly in this present World.

But with respect to any who are disengag'd from their scruples, I have shew'd they can be under no obligation of Entangling such Persons in them.

VI. What the Business of their weekly Meetings is, which is the close of the 5th, and what the Business of their general Correspondence is, which is the substance of their last Expostulation, I can't pretend to acquaint you with. Only you observe as well as I, that they are the great Instruments in Compacting them together; the Engines by which their Interest is carried on. In one their Designs are form'd, by the other communicated through the Nation; one prepares the Springs and disposes the Wheels in order, the other gives Motion to the whole Machine; but their Opera-



Operations are remote from View, Secret, and Inclosed: So that what Measures are concerted in their Weekly Meetings, and what is agreed upon by their General Correspondence, we can form no more than probable Conjectures of. All the Particulars we find, are the redressing Abuses, and applying proper Remedies to such Evils as break out among them; but the General View and Intention of them, is a vigorous Prosecution of their Interest.

In the Conclusion of the Letter, they solemnly adjure their *London Brethren*, by the Name of our Blessed Saviour, That they set about these Things with Constancy and Zeal, for the Publick Good of themselves, I suppose they mean. And after several Motives, they add for the last, the Peace of their Consciences, and the Serenity of their Minds, when, in a Dying Hour, they shall reflect with Triumph, upon their hearty Endeavours to serve the Will of God in their Generations, and to secure the true Religion to their Posterity. (*Let. p. 6.*) Where, if by the true Religion, they mean the Pure Profession of the Faith, it will be Matter of Joy and Comfort to all, who endeavour to transmit it pure and undefiled to their Posterity. But if by the true Religion they mean their manner of Holding the Faith in Separation from the Establish'd Church, I am sorry to see that they build their Comfort on such uncertain Ground. And that they are so fully bent on the Cause of Separation, as to carry it on to the utmost, and make it an Argument of Joy and Triumph at their Death. When People are so rigid in their way, and especially when they shall place their Religion in the Terms of their Separation, it must alienate their Minds from Peace, and render them less inclin'd to any Thoughts of Concord with the Church. I do not say that by the True Religion they mean their own Manner of Professing it, in Contradiction to us; but I only shew the Consequences if that be their Persuasion. And yet when I consider it, I can say no less; for the Care of their Posterity, in Securing them from the Corruptions and Impositions of our Church, is made a matter of Conscience in their first Article of Expostulation. This Exhortation in the Conclusion is not carrying on their Cause: the Motives must have a Peculiar Reference to

that; and then it can hardly otherwise be understood, than that they should rejoice on their Death-Beds for Securing the true Religion to their Posterity, as themselves profess it in a purer Way.

I know I might add the peculiar Determination of Posterity by the Adjective *Yours*, as an Argument that their own Children are more immediately intended, because else they had more properly expressed in general their Care to secure Religion to Posterity.

But this may look like a Criticism; and therefore I wave it.

However, if such be their Meaning, a greater Zeal, and a more resolute Purpose of carrying on their Cause cannot be expressed. To make it the Business of their Lives, and the Joy and Triumph of their Death, are Arguments which leave us but little Hope of prevailing with those, who are so persuaded.

And yet in Charity to the Souls of many, who may verily think that they ought to do many Things in the Cause of Separation, contrary to our Church, and for so doing, may rejoice at the time of Death. I wish this Matter were stated as a Case of Conscience, to show them what little Reason they have for Joy on any such Account. For, not to insist on the Argument I have already us'd, that they can be under no Obligation of bringing up their Children in the Principles of Separation, which alone would solve the Point, it may also be consider'd, That nothing which may prove Matter of Sorrow to them after their Death, can be a proper Argument of Joy before it. Now it is certain, that to cause Divisions in a Church, in which we may communicate without Sin, and especially to carry on and propagate these Divisions to succeeding Ages, must be a Sin in the sight of God, who has commanded us to preserve the Unity of the Church. Whether these Divisions be causeless or not, must to them be uncertain at least, till the Secrets of all Hearts shall be reveal'd, and their apprehending never so much Reason for them will signify nothing, if at last it prove, that they might have continued in this Church without Sin. So that if in the end they prove guilty of breaking the Peace of the Church

by



by unreasonable Separations, as 'tis impossible they should be certain that they shall not, then their Triumphs will be turn'd into Shame, and their Joy to Mourning: And therefore 'tis highly incongruous, to assure our selves before God, when we know not what Judgment God will pass upon us: For certainly the Controversie between us is not yet so clear, as to leave the Dissenters in no doubt about it, and we may at least have as fair a Pretence, and as good Reason, to think our selves in the Right, as they. Let them consider therefore, whether to be zealous in a dubious Point can be any Argument of Joy at Death, when they have more Reason earnestly to pray to God to look upon the Sincerity of their Hearts, and to pardon them, if in the Uprightness of their Mind they have been mistaken.

Let them consider, that to be Zealous in a Matter, wherein they may be at last mistaken, notwithstanding all their present Assurance, and by their Zeal to derive irreparable Mischiefs on the Church of God, must involve them in much Guilt if at the last Account, they should find themselves deceiv'd. And this certainly, which must be so uncertain in the Event, can never be a solid Cause of Comfort, much less of Joy and Triumph, in a Dying Hour.

It may be said, that they are Sincere, and desire, and endeavour nothing so much as the Glory of God, and the Good of his Church; and their Sincerity in the Discharge of what they verily believ'd their Duty, may be a just ground of Joy at present, tho' it afterwards appear that they were mistaken.

But in Answer to this, let it be further considered, that Sincerity can never justify an erroneous Action, but only be an Argument with Almighty God to pardon the Sin committed in the Integrity of our Hearts. And what is their only Plea for Pardon, can never give them any Occasion of Joy and Triumph, by Reflecting on their Sincerity in those Actions, which without it, had lost them to all Eternity.

St. Paul verily thought he ought to persecute the Christians; he did it from as full a Conviction of Conscience, and

and an Integrity of Heart, as sincere as can be pretended in the Cause of Separation. Yet it seems he was in the Wrong. And would this, had he dy'd in that Perswasion, have been a just Argument of Joy and Triumph at his Death?

And can it then be so to those who are zealous in the Cause of Separation, when, after all the Assurance they can have in this World, they may find themselves deceiv'd in the next?

I have insisted on this point the longer, because whatever is meant by that Expression, which gave me Occasion for it, it is plain from other places, that they look on carrying on the Cause of Separation, as a Matter of Conscience, a Discharge of their Ordination Vow, and of the Duty they owe, to what they call, the Church of God: But I have prov'd in the former pages, that they can be under no Obligation of propagating their principles, either to the Members of our Church, or to posterity; and I hope, that for Peace and Concord's sake, they will never make Zeal for Separation, the Business of their Lives, and the Triumph of their Death.

Could they really think their people, running into Sin, should they conform to our Church? Were their Numbers less'n'd, and their Congregations empty'd by Conformity? Would they look upon us as all polluted? Or should they not rather joyce at the Restoration of peace to the Church of God? If themselves cannot conform, Can they think it their Duty to hinder others, without concluding all under Sin for their Conformity? And will they pronounce all guilty of Sin, in complying with the Rules of our Church? I am perswaded they have more Charity: and therefore since the Peace of the Church is to be valued above all things, where it is not inconsistent with their Duty to God, I take them to be under the highest Obligation not to perswade any from it; but if they cannot conform themselves, to suffer Men to follow their own Judgments freely. For if Conformity be no Sin to them who do conform, then others can be under no Obligation but to themselves, and must be guilty of breaking the Unity of the Church, if they insuse their Perswasions into any, and perplex their Minds with Doubts, who before were satisfy'd in their Conformity, and guilty of no Sin in Conforming to us. And therefore all their Zeal and Industry, and Endeavours to continue the Separation, must, upon these Principles, very much encrease their Guilt, and can never be a proper Reflection for Joy and Triumph at the Time of Death.

Thus, Sir, I have run through the Letter, and have troubled you much longer than I thought to do, when I first took Pen in Hand. And now for a Conclusion; with reference to the foregoing Pages, I must assure you, that I have said nothing thro' the whole, but what is the real Sense of my Heart, and do wish for nothing so much as Peace and Unity in the Church. And if Exhortations would prevail only so far, as to make Men consider the Cause between us, and once more to doubt, whether they ought to continue those Divisions which have tore the Body of the Church, and miserably defac'd that Beauty, which consists in Unity, and the Harmony of all the Members, I should still entertain some Hopes, that those who agree in One Faith, would agree in one Worship also.

For as to the Controversy: the Separation has occasion'd, I am fully satisfy'd by all that I have read, as well as by the best Judgment I am Master of, that there is not one sinful Term in our Communion; and all our Divines, I dare answer for them, are fully satisfy'd in their Consciences of the same. The London Cases, and several excellent Pieces besides, have set this Matter beyond Dispute, altho' the Nonconformists will still dispute it; for it is no Argument against the Truth, that it is not acknowledg'd, and no Argument that a Man is not confused, that he will still persist in his Opinion; because when a Truth is clearly prov'd, the Incapacity can't lie in the Argument that proves it, but in him, who refuses to receive it. When Men have us'd themselves



themselves to false Ways of Reasoning, they are less capable of judging by the true Rules of Argument; and sometimes thro' Obstinacy, sometimes thro' Prejudice, and Weakness of Understanding, the Force of the plainest Reason can make no Impression on them.

Now from all this it follows, that supposing all the Terms of our Communion clear'd from the Charge of Sin, as certainly they have been, the Fault must lye on them, who will not be convinc'd, but most unreasonably continue, and repeat that Charge against us.

And therefore, if the Peace of the Church be of any Weight, and the preserving it, a Duty incumbent on all who call themselves Christians, it is incumbent on every Nonconformist seriously to examine these Matters, not to sit down contented with his present Perswasion, but to lay aside all Prejudice, and with a sincere, and honest Heart, to weigh the Arguments for Conformity: if any Doubt arises, not to go to that Teacher only whom he has chosen to himself, but to those also, who are commission'd by Christ to instruct him in his Duty. Let him give both Sides an equal Hearing, and earnestly apply himself to God for the Direction of his Judgment, and God will not suffer him to be mistaken, but according to the Sincerity of his Intentions it shall be done unto him.

The great Zeal of the Nonconformists in propagating the Separation, has induc'd in the Conclusion, to say thus much, to show them that they can be under no Obligation to such a Practice, but are under the highest imaginable, to seek the Peace and Unity of the Church: If their Consciences cannot be satisfy'd, I pray God to have Compassion on their Weakness, and to pardon the Offence they commit, thro' Fear of offending Him: But if any among them are resolved to maintain the Cause of Separation, and from a present Perswasion, that our Communion is sinful, determin'd always to think so; such I must tell plainly, that, supposing their Perswasion should prove true, their Resolution in the mean time is not justifiable: because it obstructs the Way to Concord, and renders it impossible to convince them either of the Truth, or Falseness of any Thing in Dispute between us.

The Zeal they profess for their Cause, the Practice of continuing the Separation to their Children, and the Obligation of Conscience, they think incumbent on them to do these Things, has drawn me out into a greater length than I intended. The Peace of the Church can never be hop'd for while they continue in this Mind; and as long as their Teachers hold Presbyterian Government most agreeable to Scripture, and renounce Episcopacy, except only in the Name, 'tis impossible that Separation should cease, unless they will be so sincere with their people, as to exhort them to that Church, in which, to us, they own the Terms of Lay-Communion lawful.

And for themselves, unless they can prove that they ought to gather Congregations from us, when they own that People may lawfully hold Communion with us; they must needs perceive, that they break the Unity of the Church, where Peace and Concord might have been preserv'd; and therefore tho' they may think themselves Ministers of the Gospel, yet they cannot think themselves bound to exercise their Ministry, when the Exercise of it is Destructive of the Church's peace.

For where the Faith is truly profess'd, and the Doctrines of the Gospel truly preach'd; where the Terms of Communion are lawful, and may without Sin be comply'd with, the peace of the Church overweighs all other Considerations, and ought to convince them, that where it must be destroyed by the Exercise of their Ministry, it must be preserv'd by their Silence.

This they are bound in Conscience to consider, and upon their own principles, are oblig'd in the mean time, not to intimate, that the Terms of our Communion are sinful, when they own the contrary. With reference to the people, they are oblig'd in Conscience never to draw off any from the Church, but as much as in them lies, to exhort every Minister of their respective Congregations, to forsake a practice so injurious to Christianity.

Much might be said upon this Subject, which requires a just Discourse, and cannot be absolv'd in the Conclusion of a Letter. What I have already intimated, is sufficient to awaken the Consideration of those, who shall think the Importance of these Things deserve a serious Thought.

I have dealt plainly, and spoke my Mind freely throughout the whole. At present you see the Cause of Nonconformity is carry'd on by those of the Separation with as much Vigor and Industry as Men are capable of exerting. Whether it be by Weekly Meetings, and a general Correspondence, is not material to enquire, but we see the Fact; we see continual Funds lay'd in to supply posterity, as well as to answer their present Exigencies; and a Diligence that is so remarkable among them, can be imputed to nothing but a persuasion of their Consciences, that they are carrying on the Cause of God, which the Letter frequently declares. But there is also another Cause from whence their Activity may spring, which is frequently intimated in the Letter, tho' I have taken no Notice of it. And that is, they have form'd themselves into a distinct Polity, opposite to the Church, which they are resolv'd to uphold and maintain with all their Might: I shall pass no other Reflection on this, but that this Resolution, how dangerous soever it may look to the Establishment of the Church of England, will never do us more Injury than it has already done, till such Times as the Nonconforming Interest shall rise to such an Height, that the Presbyterians shall think us oblig'd to call them in for the Support of the Church, upon such Overtures as they shall esteem reasonable at our Hands.

Our Church has struggled with many Enemies, and she has sometimes been oppress'd, and in all Humane Appearance, buried in the Ruines of her Fall; yet she has always rose Triumphant from the Dust, and shone forth in her former Splendor. Our Divisions, like Spots in the Sun, may be discern'd upon her, but these are not yet, God be thanked, spread so wide as to obscure her Brightness. We are thankful for her Prosperity, and rejoice in the Assurance of her Safety: Which we have no Reason to doubt as long as a Protestant Prince shall sit upon the English Throne: Our Laws transmit the Church to posterity. It enjoys all the Security for its Continuance to future Ages, that Man can give: And under her present Majesty, it has, besides the Laws, a most firm Establishment in a Queen, whose Affection will always preserve it, and whose Piety will derive the Blessing of God upon it.

I shall add no more, but my prayers for the Queen and the Church, that God would bless her Majesty, and long continue the Crown she wears, in Glory upon her Head: That he would restore Peace and Unity to the Church, and inspire this Nation with a Spirit of mutual Love and Charity.

And now, Sir, having troubled you all this while, at your own Request, I hope you'll more easily excuse,

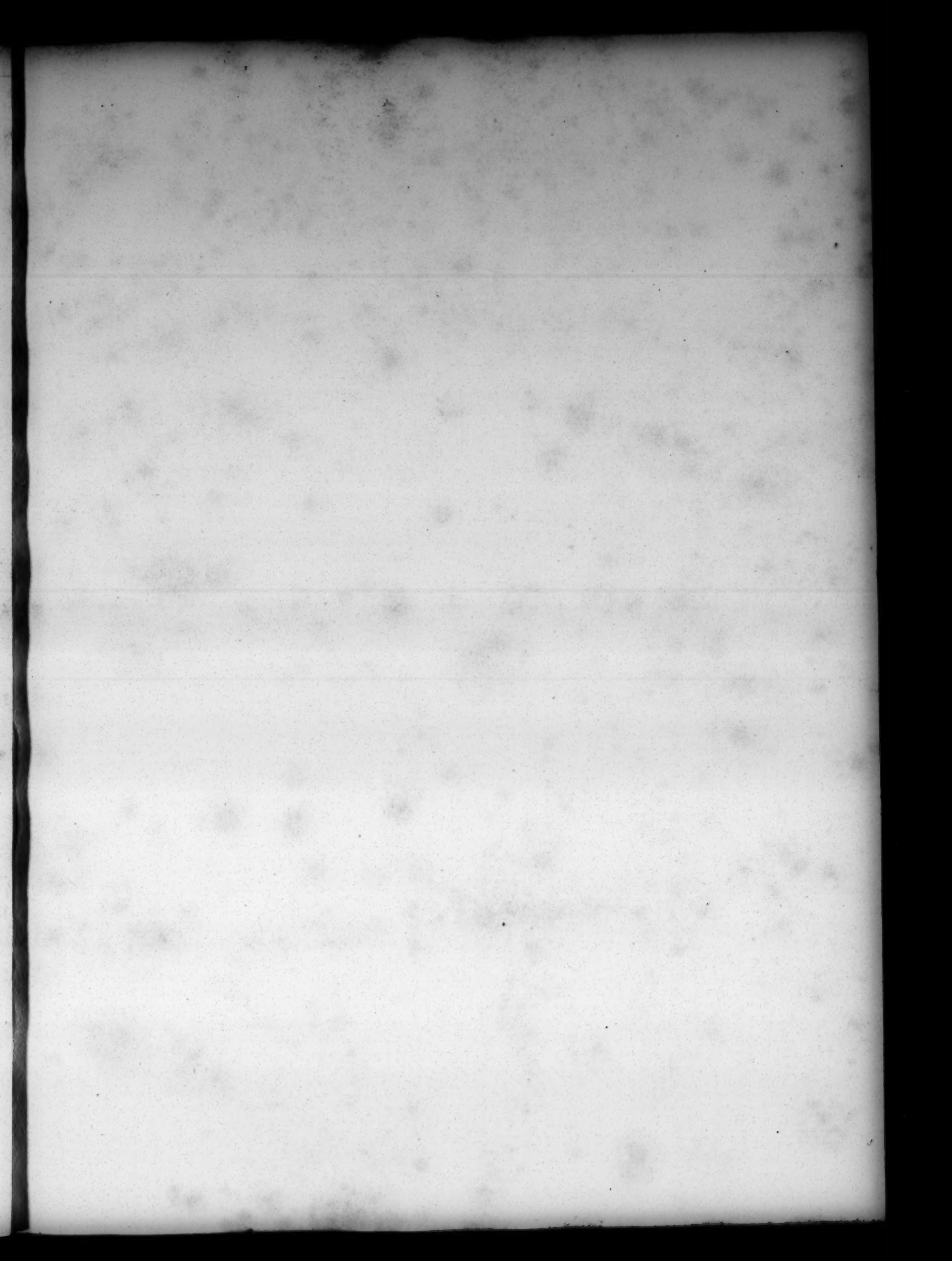
Y<sup>r</sup> R. Tours, &c.

Jan<sup>y</sup> 25th. 1706.



FINIS.





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